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EDITORIALS.

Power of Darkness

The Roman Catholic Church has given history no richer gift than its treasure of symbols, icons and spiritual metaphors. Language, logic, art and dreams are infused with messages and miracles of Catholicism for the atheist in a Christian civilization no less than for the believer. The trial of certain Turks and Bulgarians for conspiring to murder Pope John Paul II, which opened last week in Rome, will be argued on points of law, according to rules of evidence and along lines determined by politics and diplomacy. But it should also be considered a sharply symbolic drama, a pageant in the grand Roman tradition in which metaphors of good and evil, God and Anti-christ, salvation and damnation, slug it out for the soul of the world—in a courtroom located in an abandoned Olympic stadium.

Seen any other way, the proceedings are bizarre, almost comical. After some time in prison and after visits by Western intelligence types, convicted gunman Mehmet Ali Agca came up with a story implicating a network of Turkish drug runners, a Bulgarian consular official, the Rome representative of the Bulgarian airline and several shadowy characters who might have been sent by Central (European) Casting to appear in an old Balkan spy movie. Journalists with close ties, to say the least, to Italian and U.S. espionage services gave Agca's story media exposure and added the theory that the assassination attempt of May 13, 1981, must surely have been the work of the Bulgarian secret police under the control of the Soviet K.G.B. Political ideologues on two continents began reviewing the unfolding drama as a confrontation between Communism and Christianity, between the forces of terrorism, drug dealing and violence on one side and freedom, peace and democracy on the other.

The failed assassination becomes the "crime of the century," in William Safire's phrase, because it so conveniently criminalizes the Red enemy. The rising right wing—including recent converts from centrism, pragmatism and even liberalism—has assumed the task of eradicating political relativism in its East-West expression. Its members fairly froth when they hear relativists equate the United States and the Soviet Union, not only in positive attributes but in negative ones. Do not speak of Vietnam in the same breath as Afghanistan, of the *contras* with the same distaste as the Sandinistas, of Pershing 2s with the same outrage as SS-20s. The cradle of liberty cannot be equated with the crucible of Communism, they insist, because the other side is criminal: witness the plot to kill the Pope, yellow rain, KAL 007. It shows, *The New York Times's* Leslie Gelb wrote of that last event, that the "Soviet Union is different—call it tougher, more brutal or even uncivilized—than most of the rest of the world." In other words, it is beyond the reach of moral argument, without conscience and not worth engaging in negotiations.

It is possible, of course, that Agca was aided in his mad mission by Bulgarians. It is also possible that he was on several bad trips for any number of secret services, criminal entrepreneurs and fanatical cults. But it seems probable that the crazed Turkish Gray Wolf—the man who thinks he is at once Jesus Christ and the destroyer of the world—is simply another metaphor for madness in times too parlous to apportion pure light to all God's children in one place, and pitch darkness to hell's progeny in the other.